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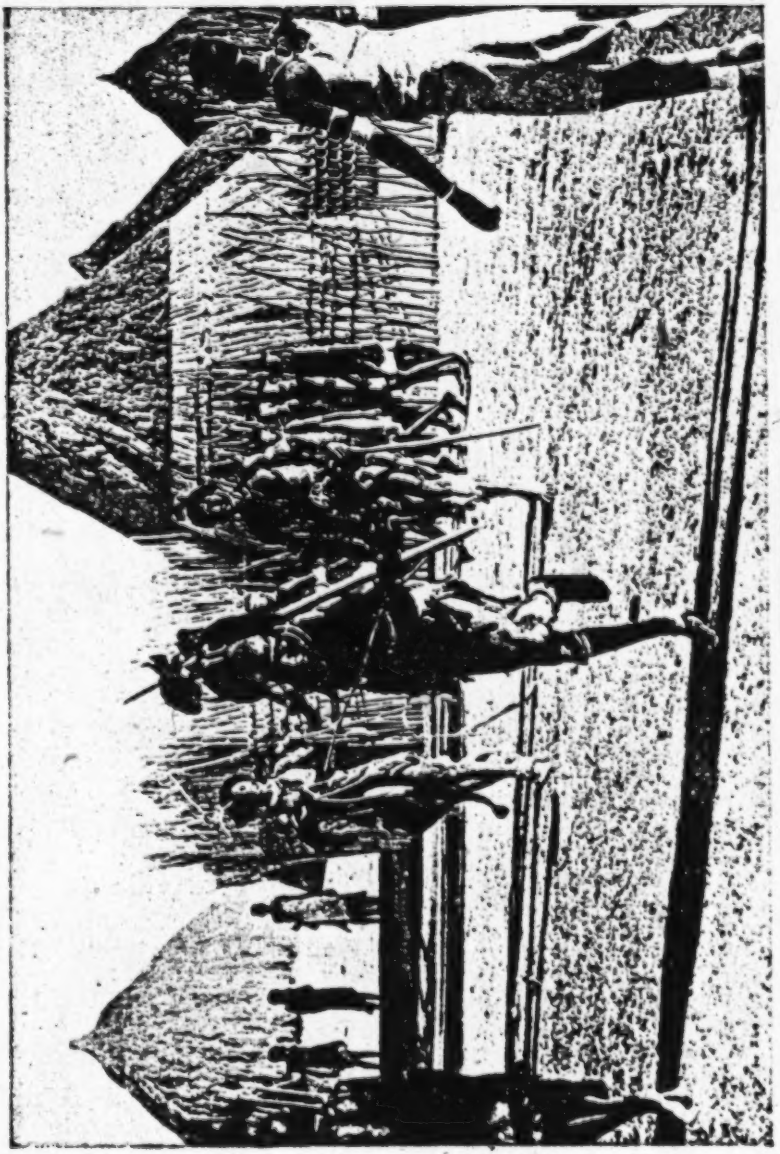

[p. 62 D]

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955.
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

312 Aguno I stopped to watch a couple of men stretching and
[281] scraping a cow hide. One of them called to a girl in the village, his wife or sister, to bring him some water to soften the skin. With great reluctance she brought a large bowlful and stood by, while with lavish hand the man splashed the precious water on skin and ground indiscriminately. He then demanded more and I thought, and hoped, that she would refuse; that she would remind him that she had walked eleven burning miles to bring the water that he threw away so thoughtlessly. After a moment's hesitation, however, she picked up the bowl he had thrown at her feet and turned slowly towards the hut, but as she did so I saw two tears overflow from her brimming eyes and roll down her cheeks. Such
[562] drudgery is forced on these womenfolk by circumstance and custom, and we can only wish that things were in some way bettered.

361 But now let us proceed and see what a Shilluk village is
[487] like. We enter it along a little path which leads from the main road and passes through the dried up, yellow stubble of last season's millet plantation.

Passing through the space between the fences of two
[367] neighbouring homesteads, we come upon a large level
[535] circle of bare ground which is the playground of the village and its dancing floor. Sometimes it boasts a tree, green and leafy in contrast to its dun, dusty surroundings, under the refreshing shade of which the village elders gather to discuss
[521] the affairs of their little world: the price of cattle, the failure of the harvest, the prospect of the fishing. Under the tree, too,
[534] or at the further side of the dancing floor, are two large forked stakes driven into the ground to hold the drums. Around this circular central space the family dwellings are grouped.

[621] Villages vary in size, from the small hamlet consisting of two or three homesteads to a large settlement of sixty or seventy. An average-sized village contains about thirty families. All, however, are set up on the same plan, and the houses are built according to the same pattern. Each house-
351 hold consists of two houses set facing one another in a small

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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enclosure surrounded by a reed fence which overlaps on the side facing the central space, leaving a narrow entrance about two feet long. This is so narrow that one has to turn sideways to get through it. The narrowness of this passage and the smallness of the doorway of each house are a means of defence against possible aggressors. No intruder could rush into the small compound and take those inside by surprise. As an additional protection the passage is blocked at night with thorn branches, which serve the purpose of a barbed-wire entanglement.

A chief or a nyireth may have three or four huts in his enclosure. The huts are made with walls of well-puddled cotton-soil mud about five feet in height, surmounted by a high conical thatched roof. The floor is often a little below ground level with a semi-circular step sometimes decorated with an inset pattern of mother-of-pearl, coloured glass, or fragments of pottery at the threshold. One of the two huts is used as the living and sleeping room, the other for cooking and the storing of the grain supply. The fence which encloses the homestead is about eight feet high and is constructed of millet stalks closely fastened together; it is set close to the walls of the houses. On the outside it is strengthened by cross-ties of stalks bound together, and the number of these cross-ties is regulated by strict custom: an ordinary Colo may have three or four, a chief or prince up to six, and only the fences around the king's enclosure have eight.

The largest building in the village is the communal cattle byre which is built like an ordinary hut, but about thirty feet in diameter. The high pitched roof, because of its great span, is very heavy and has to be supported by strong branches of trees based solidly on the floor and wedged tightly against the slope of the roof. In an open space near the byre thirty or forty stakes are driven into the ground, standing perhaps a foot above it; at first sight these might give one the impression that the villagers indulge in the simple pleasure of a game of quoits in the cool of the evening when the day's work is done, but they are for the much

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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[Facing p. 53]

Photo : Fr. F. Spekauskas

A drudge that means a trudge. Shilluk women set off for the Nile to fetch water. From Detwok—a mile each way